NEED ANALYSIS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING COMPETENCY TEST FOR FOREIGN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Purpose of Study: This study aims to explore the needs of BIPA learners and BIPA program managers. The research strategy applied in this research is descriptive explanatory. The subjects of this study are foreign students of Darmasiswa and KNB programs and the managers of BIPA programs at Muhammadiyah Universities that manage BIPA programs.

Methodology: Data collection is done by document (document analysis), participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and questionnaire. The data validity test is done by data triangulation technique, investigative triangulation, and source triangulation.

Results: Based on the results of the analysis, it is known that there is a difference of need between BIPA learner and BIPA manager in developing writing competence test for foreign students.

Implications/Applications: This has an impact on the importance of needs considerations as a basis for developing the competency test of foreign students writing.

Keywords: Needs Analysis, Test, Writing Competence, Foreign Students

INTRODUCTION

Language competence consists of four language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The language competence is an action in using the language based on reality for the communication purpose. The language activities or work staged language competence is a real manifestation of one's linguistic competence. The level of linguistic competence of someone is generally reflected in his/her language skills.

Various aspects of language and communicative functions of comprehension and the language used should be integrated into the language competency test. That is, through the linguistic tests will measure a person's knowledge of the language, but it must be integrated into the form of understanding and use of language naturally and contextual. The linguistic tests which have intended to measure the grammatical competence as a basic ability to communicate are necessary to get special attention. However, the linguistic test should not be separated from the communicative function of language, and if enforced, it would turn into another kind of language tests that do not measure language competence. Thus, the language competency test will be tangible as the test of language, the understanding and the use of language. Concretely, the language competency test that will involve the four aspects must be in the contextual side. That is, it must be in a situation of actual use, reasonable, and laid in a particular context. If the aspects above being ignored, the test of that four language skills could be plunged into an isolated and artificial test. Such test tendency actually is to consider as the main problem of language testing nowadays. (Brown, Douglas, 2004; Pedraja-Rejas, Liliana, 2018)

Writing is one of many language skills that should be mastered by language learners, including foreign language learners. Writing is a manifestation of the most complex language competence that language learners have to learn in addition to listening, speaking and reading. Assessment of writing competence should not be a task of selecting and producing language only, but rather how to express ideas by using appropriate written language. In other words, writing should involve linguistic and extralinguistic elements. (Nurgiyanto, Burhan, 2010; Zare, & Zade, 2014)

Assessment of writing competence can be analytically determined by five components, namely: (1) grammatical, (2) vocabulary, (3) mechanics, (4) fluency (style and ease of communication), and (5) form (organization). Hughes modified the component into (1) the quality of communication; (2) organization; (3) argumentation; (4) correctness of language; and (5) the suitability of the language context. In accordance with the principle of authentic assessment, writing competency test should be the task of direct practice writing in various forms and types of posts that are factually appropriate to the needs. (Hughes, 1996; Suleri and Cavagnaro, 2016)
The basic competence of writing an Indonesian learner as a beginner-level of foreign language is determined as follows: (1) able to fill forms/forms related to personal information: name, address, occupation, country of origin, family, etc; (2) able to write short and simple sentences relating to the direction, location, and daily activities for the fulfillment of concrete needs; (3) capable of writing short and simple narrative texts, examples telling stories of personal letter experience; (4) able to write procedural texts related to activities in public places, eg. opening bank accounts, taking money at ATMs, completing immigration, hospitalization, and borrowing books in libraries; (5) able to write text related to simple and routine tasks, for example: writing instructions, instructions, procedures, etc.; and (6) able to write nonformal texts about feelings, self-background, the environment, and matters related to their needs, such as education, health, social interaction, and entertainment. Examples: personal letters, letters, simple poems, short messages, and many more.

Needs analysis from the individual learner's perspective is an important part of any instructional program design and it can benefit both teachers and students alike. The learner-centered approach to language learning builds on the premise that teaching/learning programs should be responsive to learners’ needs. (Hutchinson, & Waters, 1987; Pedraja-Rejas, Liliana, Roberto Vega Massó, and Jaime Riquelme Castañeda. 2018 Markova, Siherbakova, Depsames, Tsyplakova, & Yakovleva, 2016; Hamp-Lyons, 2001) As Hamp-Lyons points out EAP so that the Indonesian Language for the Foreign Learners (BIPA) program begins with the learner and the situation. Indonesian competence test development is based on the learner needs which leads to a research area known as ‘needs analysis’ or ‘needs assessment’,(Eslami, Zohreh 2010; Suyitno, 2007)

Teaching Indonesian for Foreign Learners or Indonesian as a Foreign Language (IFL) is different from teaching Indonesian as a first language. The differences are due to the characteristics of the learners. EFL learners generally are adults who have language and cultural background and learning style different from that Indonesian learner have. (Ahmadi, Zamani, & Sarzaym, 2014; Sukmadinata, 2012)

BIPA’s learner is a foreign learner who has a different language and cultural background with the language culture he studied. This different background affects the level of competence of different BIPA learner starts from beginner to advanced student level. Differences in BIPA’s learner competence level can be known through the assessment.

BIPA’s learners generally belong to adults. They have different pedagogical characteristics and norms background with Indonesian language learning as native speakers. This difference occurs because (a) BIPA’s learners generally have a strict outreach and targeted study, (b) generally, BIPA’s learners are educated people see from their background level of education, (c) BIPA’s students have a distinctive learning style and sometimes dominated by cultural backgrounds, (d) most of BIPA’s students have an interest and high motivation for learning the Indonesian language, (e) BIPA’s students have different scientific backgrounds, and (f) due to differences language system, it is causing that many BIPA’s students face difficulties in language learning, especially in pronunciation and writing. (Khuder, & Harwood, 2015)

These differences need to be taken as material which should be considered in developing the test instruments of Indonesian language competence. In this context is the writing competency test. Initial efforts that need to be done to develop a writing competence test instrument for the BIPA’s learner in accordance with the needs of BIPA’s learners are taking the need analysis of BIPA’s learners and BIPA’s operators. Through the analysis of these needs, it will be known the suitable competence writing test instruments that fit the needs of BIPA’s learner and BIPA’s operators so that it can be used as a valid, reliable, and practical learning competence tool for the BIPA’s learner.

METHODS

The strategy applied in this research is descriptive explanatory. Descriptive explanatory aims to describe and explain the patterns associated with the phenomenon and identify the relationships that affect the phenomenon.11 The subjects of this study are foreign students of the program of KNB and students studying Indonesian language at a number of Muhammadiyah Universities. Data collection techniques used in this study are document analysis, participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and questionnaire. Document analysis is done by analyzing the assessment instruments and the result of the writing competence test of foreign students. Participatory observations were made to quantify data on the condition at which the test was conducted. In-depth interviews and questionnaires were used to explore the needs of students and managers of the BIPA program on foreign students' writing competence tests. The data validity test uses data triangulation, investigative triangulation, and method triangulation. Triangulation of data is done by analyzing the same data collected from different data sources, for example, data about the condition of the competence writing competence of foreign students obtained from several Muhammadiyah Universities organizer of BIPA. Triangulation of investigators is carried out by carrying out focus group discussions (FGDs) by involving several
experts as evaluators. The triangulasi method is done by using several different methods for the same data or collect different data with the same method, for example, to obtain data about the need for competence writing test conducted in-depth interviews with students and BIPA program providers accompanied by questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted at Muhammadiyah University located in Central Java, East Java, and Special Region of Yogyakarta. At University A competence test writing with a vocabulary and grammar competence test is conducted separately. The writing competence test used for the placement test consists of two tasks, the first task describing the data in the graph with a minimum length of 150 words is worked out for 20 minutes. The second assignment writes an opinion with at least 250 words in 40 minutes with the question “Do you agree with a statement that reveals that the parent is the best teacher? Explain and give an example!”. The form of the test as described above is difficult to be done by students who just learned Indonesian for the first time. The average student is not able to answer that question. There are some students who answered by writing back the questions presented. This is an important note for researchers in the field of writing competence development tests for foreign students.

The writing competence test for different classes is presented in the form of a written test with the instructions "Make a paper that contains the draft research proposal!" “Write between 400 to 800 words!”. Competence for writing tests with such clues indicate that there is a certain direction about what is tested is the student's ability to practice writing or pouring ideas in writing that has been limited to the length of students’ writing and the time required for writing practice. Response answers should be presented in handwriting form and completed within 90 minutes. This indicates that the writing tests presented belong to the category of authentic assessment. Fraud on the tests can be minimized by applying the structured execution in the exam room. It is better than the application on tasks that are taken home so that pure work can be produced by students. It is also very beneficial to avoid plagiarism practices. However, to write a draft research proposal within 90 minutes is a very tough test for students because the topic theme is not limited.

Based on the results of corrections on the results of students' writing, it has been noted that only students who have learned Indonesian more than two years are able to do the task. Students who are new to the Indonesian language recognize that the test is very difficult for them to do.

In addition to writing tests, students are also specifically tested for their competence in mastering grammar and vocabulary structures. Grammar and vocabulary test tests are carried out separately by writing tests. This test is carried out in the form of a short objective test. The test materials of grammatical structure and vocabulary include: (1) paraphrasing; (2) adding affix pe-; (3) confix me; (4) prefix fix; (5) suffix -nya; (6) augmented verbs; and (7) writing compound sentences.

In contrast to the implementation of writing competence tests in University A, in University B, writing competence tests carried out with two techniques. The first technique takes place during a placement test with a very simple question: “Write your opinion about Indonesia!” In addition to writing tests, foreign students also tested grammatical competence. The grammar test is divided into three subs, i.e. the use of the word that has ber- as an affix or the discourse of the passage, converts the active sentence to passive and vice versa, and determines one sentence in using the i-i and the add.

In the learning process, students are asked to write the most memorable experiences during the course. Reports are collected in portfolios written on computers and made into books with the works of other students. This type of assessment by the manager is more valid because students write down things that they experience directly. However, there are drawbacks to this technique. Because students do this task at home and write on computers, the results of the collected works can be done with the help of native speakers of the Indonesian language.

Khuder dan Harwood concluded that giving writers more time increases the quality of their texts in a meaningful way, with mean scores of almost one point higher awarded to the non-test condition texts. As we hypothesized, when it comes to writers' writing profile, writers did not differ in their planning and revision behavior across both situations and during different writing stages. However, they differed in their evaluation as they evaluated more in the third stage of the non-test situation, a finding that contradicts what we expected. Nonetheless, it is not a surprising one as it makes sense that writers would use that extra time for re-reading what they have written. A surprising finding not in line with our predictions is the statistically significant difference in the quality of texts produced in both situations (probable reasons for this are discussed in the discussion section above). A finding that adheres to expectations is the statistically insignificant relationship between time spent on writing processes and writing product; spending more time on a writing process did not result in a better text. Writing processes were mostly used more effectively under limited time.
Foreign university students who are studying the Indonesian language are adults (not children). The adults that are being examined here are learners over the age of 17. There are several traits to be considered in the development of writing competence tests for foreign students. First, foreign students of Indonesian learners as foreign languages who already have enough knowledge and insight so that their needs, as well as the needs of adults, are no longer the needs of children. Therefore, the actual topics they want to learn are common topics such as environmental issues, human relationships, world events, and so on. Secondly, the learners of Indonesian as a foreign language requires the recognition of the development of competence from the beginning of learning to the end of learning. Recognition of the development of these competencies can be obtained from tests conducted later that the students ‘greatly’ need to increase their general proficiency in English. Students’ low at a certain level of language proficiency was perceived to be a significantly more important problem by students in humanities, and engineering compared with the students from medicine. Limited vocabulary, slow reading speed, poor listening, speaking, writing and reading comprehension, boring classes, access to the Internet, and lack of instructors’ emphasis on the use of the internet were ranked highly by the majority of the students. The results show that students prefer learner-centered classes and demand more involvement in class activities. It is possible that teachers’ perception of students’ low English language proficiency and low motivation leads to teachers’ lower use of student-centered activities. Teachers need to make constant efforts to keep up to date with new teaching methods to be able to facilitate interactive classrooms with students of different English proficiency levels. Appropriate institutional support, such as providing professional development, releasing time, and funds for teachers are needed to help familiarize the teachers with the new methodologies.

The study indicates that internet access facility is needed by foreign students who are studying Indonesian beginner level. To be able to produce sentences, they need a dictionary to determine the words that are relevant to the questions presented. The presentation of the test should also consider the level of competence of Indonesian language learners as a foreign language. If the BIPA program manager only focuses on the material presented in a book published by the government, not necessarily the basic competencies that have been determined can be achieved maximally because the material presented is not all in accordance with the needs of learners.

There are five key components to consider in assessing writing competence. Hughes states that the five components are: (1) the quality of communication; (2) organization; (3) argumentation; (4) correctness of language; And (5) the suitability of the language context. However, the facts on the ground show that most assessors of writing competence are grammatically oriented. This causes the results of the assessment is not comprehensive because basically the quality of communication and the suitability of the language context is something that should not be ignored. Based on research conducted by Neumann (2014), it shows that the learning of foreign languages that focus on the grammatical negative impact on the development of ideas in writing.

CONCLUSIONS

The result of this need analyses of competence writing test of foreign students shows that there is a difference of requirement between foreign students BIPA with the requirement of BIPA program manager. Foreign students of Indonesian learners as foreign languages already have enough knowledge and insight so that their needs, as well as the needs of adults, are no longer the needs of children. Considering the number of foreign students who are just learning Indonesian for the first time, the goal of communicating daily with Indonesian speakers becomes the priority scale for Indonesian language learners as foreign languages to be able to use the Indonesian language in accordance with the communication context which is also in accordance with the needs of communication performed in both formal and nonformal. The managers in the universities feel that it is necessary to be able to use a competence writing test instrument that suits the conditions and the needs of foreign university students, easy to apply, and economical in terms of price and time.

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